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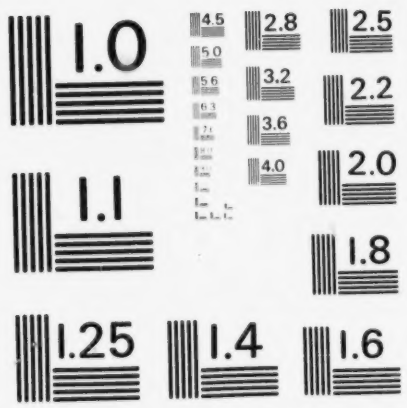

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Peace Corps language training in Spanish at the University of New Mexico is described. Such training features as class size, instructional levels, instructional method, drill, grammar presentation, classroom and laboratory work, review, testing, supplementary materials, use of native informants, teacher characteristics, and practice at mealtime are discussed. (AF)

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Notes on the Peace Corps Language Training Program

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PEACE Corps language training differs from the usual college language course in several significant aspects. In many programs, trainees present the widest variation in age, experience, and academic background. Their training schedule is rigorous; classes here are in session from 7:30 A.M. until 9:30 at night, and much of the training is physically exhausting. There is little time or energy for home study, and language classes may be held at unpropitious hours.

The Peace Corps trainee must learn, in the space of twelve weeks, enough of the new language to enable him to function in the society of the host country. Not only must he achieve basic communication, but he must be able to persuade the people there to alter some of their behavior patterns. This demands a more fundamental understanding of the language than that required to find a gas station or a Coca-Cola.

Language classes are held, in our programs, for about four hours a day during the first eight weeks. In addition, everyone is required to speak Spanish at the evening meal. Table monitors lead the conversation and insure the observance of linguistic discipline.

Because the language we deal with, Spanish, is widely taught, it is necessary to group the trainees according to their previous achievement. We give a set of placement tests. After the student has been placed in a class he may move up or down according to his rate of learning.

Our classes average about ten students. If a class is slow, it should be smaller. There should, in any case, be ample time for individual work. The student must accustom himself to using the foreign language as a means of communication between individuals. He cannot always have the support of a group response. Besides, there are many obvious pedagogical advantages in the smaller group.

Within the instructional level (beginning, intermediate, or advanced) teachers rotate each week, so that each class is exposed to two or three different instructors during the training period. When possible, we try to see that each class has both men and women as instructors, and native speakers as well as non-native ones. Thus the students become accustomed to different voices and mannerisms, and they do not fall into the common student error of feeling that Spanish is something one speaks only to Professor Fulano de Tal. This rotation necessitates a uniform method of grammar presentation throughout the staff. Two perfectly adequate presentations, if different, can throw the beginning student into utter confusion. We have frequent staff meetings to discuss the presentation of lesson material, and a uniform pattern is established. Before rotation takes place, staff members check carefully with each other on material covered, so that each can begin the new class with no lost motion.

While rotation is necessary, we feel sure that three instructors are the maximum a class should be exposed to in the brief period of training. Otherwise, there is too much risk of losing efficiency and continuity.

Our instructional method might be called audio-visual-lingual, since we exploit all these aspects. Our basic text, for all groups except the very proficient, is *Modern Spanish*.[1] We allow the student to use the written word from the start. The hazards of this technique are outweighed, we feel, by the increased confidence of

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[1] *Modern Spanish*, a Project of the Modern Language Association. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1960.

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the student, and by the memory aid that the visual symbol offers.

The fundamental concepts of phonetics, when first presented, are cued to English. In this way the student can perceive for himself the meaningful nature of intonation (for example) when it is presented in carefully selected contrasts. He is then led to imitate all aspects of this teacher's speech in Spanish. Phonetic generalizations are made over the Spanish patterns after they have been learned. Spanish sounds that do not occur in English are carefully described and practiced.

All discussion *about* the language and about learning procedures is in English to give maximum communication in minimum time.

The dialogues are presented first with open books, and any questions of structure, vocabulary, or pronunciation are entertained during the initial period (about 20 minutes) that is devoted to the dialogue. Dialogue practice takes place during the first 10 minutes or so of every succeeding class hour until learning is complete. The danger of block learning is minimized by converting suitable structures in the dialogue into pattern drills during dialogue practice sessions, and by demanding quick translation of isolated words and phrases. Dialogues are practiced in the laboratory only after they have been well learned in class. Otherwise there is danger of the student's rehearsing a mistake, in spite of all monitoring. In the earlier stages, the trainee's ear is not reliable.

A typical classroom hour consists of some dialogue practice (both choral and individual), a presentation of morphology or grammar, and drills. Verb morphology is shown by arranging printed strips bearing the appropriate morphemes on a flannelboard. The following diagram is an example:

Subject Pronoun	Verb Stem	Tense-Mode Suffix	Person-Number Suffix
Nosotros	com	e	mos

The teacher displays and drills the complete paradigm, indicating the subject pronoun and eliciting from the class the correct verb form. When the class is able to respond very readily, the teacher removes the material in one column —for example, the tense-mode suffix—and drills the class again. He then removes one column after another, until the class is responding with the correct verb form entirely from memory.

This type of drill, which permits high speed and a large number of responses per minute, leads to good memory retention. The subject pronoun is associated, both visually and aurally, with the appropriate form of the verb. Repetitions are sufficient for good retention, and fast enough that they do not become dull. The teacher can quickly substitute verb stems, and drill many different verbs in a short space of time. Verb morphology is taught in this way before drilling with longer sentence structures.

Grammar presentations are made in English, and in the clearest possible terms. In the event that a structural item must be defined, it is done by means of examples, drawn from previously learned dialogue material that show this item in use. Care is taken to choose examples that contain no problems of meaning, so that the student's mind is not distracted by a multiplicity of factors.

In the case of a fairly complex structure, such as a noun clause, the procedure might consist first of demonstrating what constitutes a clause—for example: *Vienen*—then subordinating this to another brief clause: *Sé que vienen.* After the class has recognized the constituent elements of the two clauses, the nature of the subordinate clause is established by substituting a noun in its slot: *Sé la dirección.* This is followed by more examples of noun clauses functioning as direct objects and as predicate nominatives.

This procedure has several advantages—it identifies the item in terms of Spanish structures rather than English ones, in which its distribution may, sometimes, be very different (the present participle is a case in point). It also teaches useful terminology and a technique of analysis that the student can apply in making generalizations for himself. The fairly widespread ignorance of grammatical terms is often more of a benefit than an obstacle, because a student with only "a little knowledge" may tend to equate the distribution of a Spanish structural item to that of the English one, simply because they bear the same label.

Since each language organizes reality in its own way, it is necessary to define carefully the

Spanish setup where it differs markedly from the English. In this area, the most effective implement we have found is the *Visual Grammar*[2] of Dr. W. E. Bull. This enables us to have recourse to a pictorial representation of reality itself, and the student sees the contrasts in terms of entities and events, not in the forced circumlocutions of another language. For example, the distinction between *Los alumnos levantan la mano* (The students raise their hands —one each) and *Los alumnos levantan las manos* (The students raise their hands—two each) is apparent to all at a glance.

Such problems as the preterite and imperfect aspects of the verb are overcome more effectively by the visual grammar method than by any other I have used. In many cases, the staff has prepared drills for practicing the discrimination illustrated by the *Visual Grammar*, since such exercises are not often found.

The basic pattern of our grammar instruction consists of three parts—identifying a structural unit when necessary (as in the case of the noun clause); presenting the discrimination involved (for example, indicative versus subjunctive clauses); and drilling the morphology (in this instance, the appropriate verb forms). The student, when he has completed the course, has become familiar with the basic structures of Spanish. His further learning in the host country consists principally of acquiring new lexical items, which he can fit into the previously-learned structures. Through his practice in identifying the "slot" into which a word fits, he should, in most cases, be able to incorporate correctly new words and idioms into his vocabulary.

Tests are staff-prepared and are given at the end of each unit. They are partly aural and partly written, and are intended to show the teacher the extent to which the material has been mastered.

In a program calling for twenty to thirty hours a week of language instruction it is easy to go beyond the saturation point in the teaching of vocabulary and structural items. Peace Corps trainees must be equipped with a larger vocabulary in a shorter period of time than students usually require. But their progress seems to suffer most severely if they "surfeit with too much." The techniques of handling this problem are several. One consists in fixing firmly the meaning of drill pattern sentences before the many repetitions of the exercise, his memory tends to retain the association between meaning and sound. In this way, all drills, whatever their overt purpose, help the student to memorize vocabulary.

The hypnotic spell of constant repetitive responses needs to be broken by occasional direct questions using the same vocabulary or structural pattern, or by request for a quick translation of the last item given. In individual drilling, students are called on in a random pattern, so that they all remain alert. Students can become very apt at performing the mechanical transformations of a pattern drill without being aware of what they are doing or why. It is necessary for the teacher to recognize symptoms of this and to take action immediately. Drills at all times are delivered in normal intonation patterns and should be as nearly as possible an imitation of a conversation. The teacher always addresses the students, not the textbook.

Selected drills are practiced in the laboratory after considerable classroom work. It is important that the student be well grounded in the material before he goes to the laboratory; otherwise his time there is wasted. The laboratory is for practice of material already understood; **teaching takes place in the classroom.**

We believe that previously learned material must be frequently reviewed and have prepared some brief review dialogues that recapitulate the vocabulary of *Modern Spanish*, but in contexts different from the original ones. These dialogues are taped, and following each one a taped voice asks factual questions, in Spanish, over the dialogue material. The student, relying on his ear alone, writes brief answers in Spanish to these questions. The tapes are run several times when necessary.

Grammar presentations can be programmed to include built-in reviews. For example, when teaching the adverbial superlative *lo más pronto* it is helpful to review first the adjectival *la más bonita*. For the sake of logical programming, we may change the order of presentation of grammar sections within a unit; we teach the shortened adjectives and the ordinal numerals, for example, in immediate succession.

[2] William E. Bull, *A Visual Grammar of Spanish*. Los Angeles: University of California Extension, 1962.

The staff has prepared written exercises for each unit in the text. These are presented after the lesson has been thoroughly drilled orally. They serve as a review, and the student is permitted to use his textbook and to consult the teacher whenever necessary. The exercises are arranged so that they guide the student's researches; for example, the stem-changing verbs are grouped according to the type of change, so that the pattern is made clearly evident. The act of writing, in itself, seems to help memory retention, and the student is able to keep on learning and to consolidate his gains even when he is too tired for active oral drilling.

Change of pace is important in a strenuous day of aural-oral language learning. When we have reached the point of diminishing returns in drilling, we change to reading, free conversation, or the written exercises. We have tried to make a careful gradation of reading materials so that they will reinforce vocabulary and structures that have already been taught, and will add some useful new items that may become part of the student's passive vocabulary.

We introduce a great deal of supplementary material ranging from simple vocabulary lists to full-scale situational dialogues based on the requirements of the student's anticipated work. Some materials we supply to other departments of instruction, who reinforce our training by offering Spanish terminology when feasible.

Since at best we can teach only the most important things in our limited time, we try to select material that has not only linguistic, but also cultural and informational value. Since language must say something, it might as well say something worth hearing. We include literary selections, current newspapers, brief essays on the history of the destination country, examples of popular speech—a variety of materials from many sources.

Curiously enough, although we do not emphasize writing in any of our lower or intermediate classes, the students learn to write as well as most of the regular college students.

The advanced class uses a variety of written and taped materials in most of its sessions, although grammar, morphology and phonology are taught and drilled when the need is diagnosed. Materials used are from *Modern Spanish* from various advanced grammars, from the O'Connor and Haden *Oral Drill in Spanish*,[3] and other sources. The advanced students compose situational dialogues of their own, which are presented orally.

The advanced class has frequent sessions with native informants. A discussion topic is chosen, and each student writes later a report of the information gained in the discussion. The informant and the instructor both correct the paper.

Advanced students are taught refinements of grammar, usage, and orthography that cannot be emphasized in beginning classes. Every effort is made to increase their fluency and to enlarge their vocabulary. Aural acuity is cultivated by having them listen to tapes of Spanish speakers from different dialect areas, and then report the content.

Informant interviews are held weekly in classes at all levels. The teacher helps the students prepare for these interviews. Questions are formulated of a sort that both question and answer will probably be within the vocabulary range of the class.

At the language tables informants and instructors preside over each table. Here conventional social formulas are taught, and free conversation takes place. We have found that these mealtime sessions make a distinct contribution in bridging the gap between classroom exercises and natural communication. Questions of etiquette and of cultural differences occur that would not arise in the classroom; this gives us the opportunity to resolve such problems in a protected situation.

The most important single factor in the language program, we believe, is the teacher. It is worth every effort to secure the services of a staff of experienced teachers who have had advanced training in applied linguistics and the corresponding instructional techniques, and who have a high degree of language proficiency themselves. We have found that the graduates of full-year NDEA institutes are very well prepared instructors. In a short term program, the teacher has little time to learn by experience; he must already have done so. He will be called upon to make a quick and accurate analysis of linguistic structure, and to conduct high-speed drills without distorting normal intonation or

[3] Patricia O'Connor and Ernest F. Haden, *Oral Drill in Spanish*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Riverside Press, 1957.

losing meaningfulness through sheer monotony. Such skills are acquired only through training and practice. The teacher must have stamina and enthusiasm enough to adapt himself to a strenuous and rapidly-changing schedule, and be disposed to accept techniques and materials that may be new to him. And he must be sufficiently free of other duties so that he can give the required time and energy to the fast-paced Peace Corps program.

With such a staff, and with students as highly motivated as most Peace Corps trainees are, the brief and intensive language program can yield a good result. After our first group of Peace Corps trainees had been in the field for three months, reports from them and from their superiors indicated that only nine of the seventy individuals had experienced enough difficulty in the language to hamper their work. These results are attributable to favorable circumstances and especially to the availability of an excellent staff. Since our training program is a continuing one, and we produce a new Peace Corps generation every three months, we hope to refine our techniques and materials as we see their results in each successive group.